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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/04/2018
TAGS: PGOV PREL ASEC PHUM KDEM ZI
SUBJECT: LOCAL ELECTION OBSERVERS READY, WAITING FOR
ACCREDITATION

Classified By: Ambassador James McGee for reason 1.4 (d)

SUMMARY

¶11. (C) In a meeting with a Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) official on June 3, ZESN appeared confident and prepared to mobilize efforts to deploy observers throughout the country for the June 27 Presidential runoff. On June 2, ZESN submitted their list of about 10,000 proposed observers to the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) - the first step towards securing a MoJ invitation to participate as local election observers. However, the MoJ said they would not respond until June 10 at the earliest, leaving ZESN less than three weeks to bring the observers to Harare for training in new election rules and to apply for their individual accreditations. ZESN views the delay as a deliberate move by the Zimbabwean Government (GOZ) to limit the number of independent observers. Nonetheless, ZESN plans to conduct an independent, sample-based vote tabulation in the runoff, with the aim of providing an accurate estimate of the election results. ZESN did this successfully in the March 29 election, and believes it can pull it off again. This could prove essential should the GOZ attempt to rig the election.
END SUMMARY.

Observers Displaced, But Going Home

¶12. (C) In a meeting on June 3, ZESN Program Manager, Tsungai Kokerai, expressed confidence to poloff that ZESN would have the capacity to distribute election observers to the estimated 9,000 polling places for the June 27 presidential runoff between the incumbent, ZANU-PF's Robert Mugabe, and the Movement for Democratic Change's (MDC) Morgan Tsvangirai. Kokerai said that some of ZESN's first round observers had

been displaced - either pre-emptively or fleeing violence - in Mashonaland East, Sarabani, Mudzi South, and the Mt. Darwin area. Displaced observers from Mashonaland Central returned home about two weeks ago, following assurances from Vice President Joice Mujuru that the region was safe. Thus far, those observers have not experienced problems, giving confidence to another group of about 36 observers who plan to return to the other areas later this week. Kokerai expressed pride in ZESN observers, citing observers in the violence-ravaged Mt. Darwin area in Mashonaland Central who vowed they would observe the election again, regardless of threats.

¶13. (C) Commenting on the MDC's campaign strategies, Kokerai opined that the MDC needs to change tactics away from holding rallies - which are now poorly attended and also used by ZANU-PF militias to identify MDC members. Rather she thought that MDC should focus its efforts on encouraging people that it is safe to vote rather than who to vote for. (NOTE: Police denied permission for at least two MDC rallies over the weekend of June 1. Press reports indicate Tsvangirai toured high density neighborhoods near Bulawayo on June 4 on foot. END NOTE.) Kokerai also confirmed rumors that people, especially in rural areas, are being threatened with beatings if they do not vote at all. While some are afraid, Kokerai believes people will still vote for MDC rather than stay home on June 27. She cited a Shona proverb that is being repeated across the country, "which option is not death?" While some round-one observers fear retribution if they observe again, Kokerai said that other volunteers are emerging to fill the gaps.

GOZ Delaying Accreditation Process

¶14. (C) Kokerai explained that for ZESN to receive accreditation as an election-observing organization, it first needs an invitation from the MoJ, currently headed by Mugabe stalwart Patrick Chinamasa. (NOTE: Chinamasa was voted out of his seat in the March 29 election by his constituency in Marondera, Mashonaland East. He has, nonetheless, refused to relinquish his seat as Minister, to the protests of members of the opposition. END NOTE.) Normally, the MoJ would publish an announcement in the local press, inviting organizations such as ZESN to submit letters requesting invitation. Although this advertisement had not yet been published, ZESN - along with other independent organizations - submitted its letter yesterday. Kokerai said that the MoJ appeared disinterested and asked them why ZESN had sent the letter when MoJ haven't yet put out the advertisement.

¶15. (C) ZESN plans to submit a second, slightly different list of names on Friday June 7, so that either list that Chinamasa approves will have enough observers. ZESN is also coordinating efforts with churches and other local election observing groups to put people on multiple organizations' lists, with the goal of having at least two independent observers at each polling place.

Polling Locations, Numbers Still Unknown

¶16. (C) In the March 29 election there were approximately 9,000 polling places. However, the polling places for the June 27 runoff have not yet been announced, complicating ZESN's efforts to distribute observers. Kokerai said the polling places should be identified and agreed upon by all parties and the Zimbabwe Election Commission in advance of the election. Nonetheless, some places were identified or changed just before the March 29 election.

Confident in Parallel Vote Tabulation

¶7. (C) Kokerai appeared confident that ZESN will be able to repeat their successful parallel vote tabulation for this election. Assuming the number of polling places holds, it needs about 4,000 observers to provide "cover" for the random sample of 435 polling places that they will use for the parallel vote tabulation. Even in the unlikely circumstance ZESN cannot get accreditation for all of its observers, ZESN has mechanisms to coordinate data collection with other local observers. Kokerai dismissed the idea that the GOZ would deny local organizations accreditation to observe the election.

Fighting the Clock

¶8. (C) As the electricity went out in the house ZESN uses for its offices, Kokerai cited time as the biggest challenge they face. With their request for an accreditation invitation sitting on Minister Chinamasa's desk, ZESN cannot yet bring in its observers for training or to apply for new accreditation badges. As part of the Electoral Amendment passed in mid-May, the GOZ modified the V-11 form observers and party officials must sign at the polling place, ZESN needs to ensure its observers understand the form and keep a copy after the votes are counted. In addition, ZESN has about 2,000 new observers that need training. While such

training should last two days, she believes they will have only a couple hours to train the different groups of new observers.

COMMENT

¶9. (C) ZESN's parallel vote tabulation proved key in demonstrating Tsvangirai's lead in the March 29 presidential election, preventing Mugabe from stealing the election outright. ZESN appears confident that even if accreditations are delayed or denied, they will be able to gather enough information to repeat the parallel tabulation process. While they are frustrated with GOZ efforts to delay the accreditation process, ZESN is prepared to work around the clock to prepare. It is also reassuring that displaced observers are returning home and that they have as many as 2,000 new volunteers. END COMMENT.

McGee